The Occupy Wall Street Movement

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| We are annotating for…   1. **The goals of the movement** 2. **Ways that the First Amendment Rights helped protestors** 3. **Whether those First Amendment actions have been successful in reaching the goals so far** |

*Source: New York Times, 10/25/11*

Occupy Wall Street is a diffuse group of activists who say they stand against corporate greed, social inequality and the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process. On Sept. 17, 2011, the group began a loosely organized protest in New York’s financial district, encamping in Zuccotti Park, a privately owned park open to the public in Lower Manhattan.

The idea, according to some organizers, was to camp out for weeks or even months to replicate the kind, if not the scale, of protests that had erupted earlier in 2011 in places as varied as Egypt, Spain and Israel. Three weeks into the protest, [similar demonstrations had spread](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/04/us/anti-wall-street-protests-spread-to-other-cities.html) to dozens of other cities across the country, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and Boston. In October, demonstrations in emulation of Occupy Wall Street were held in Europe, Asia and the Americas, drawing crowds in the hundreds and the thousands.

The political impact of the movement was increasingly plain. Democrats offered cautious support and Republicans were generally critical, but both parties seemed to agree that the movement was changing public debate.

In a [Quinnipiac University poll](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1302.xml?ReleaseID=1662) released on Oct. 17, New York City voters of all political stripes said the protesters are welcome to stay on indefinitely — just as long as they obey the laws.

On the group’s Web site, [Occupywallstreet](http://occupywallst.org/), they describe themselves as a “leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions. The one thing we all have in common is that we are the 99 percent that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1 percent.”

The 1 percent refers to the haves: that is, the banks, the mortgage industry, the insurance industry. The 99 percent refers to the have-nots: that is, everyone else. In other words, said a group member: “1 percent of the people have 99 percent of the money.”

Within a week of the initial demonstration, the protest grew. On Sept. 24, police made scores of arrests as hundreds of demonstrators, many of whom had been bivouacked in the financial district as part of the protest, marched north to Union Square without a permit. As darkness fell, large numbers of officers were deployed on streets near the encampment in Zuccotti Park, where hundreds more people had gathered.

Efforts to maintain crowd control suddenly escalated: protesters were corralled by police officers who put up orange mesh netting; the police forcibly arrested some participants; and [a deputy inspector used pepper spray on four women](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/26/nyregion/videos-show-police-using-pepper-spray-at-protest.html?ref=occupywallstreet) who were on the sidewalk, behind the orange netting.

On Oct. 1, [the police arrested more than 700 demonstrators](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/police-arresting-protesters-on-brooklyn-bridge/?ref=nyregion) who marched north from Zuccotti Park and took to the roadway as they tried to cross the Brooklyn Bridge. The police said it was the marchers’ choice that led to the enforcement action, but protesters said they believed the police had tricked them, allowing them onto the bridge, and even escorting them partway across, only to trap them in orange netting after hundreds had entered.

As the Occupy Wall Street message of representing 99 percent of Americans spread across the country, [news media coverage of the Occupy movement spread, too,](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/13/us/occupy-wall-street-protests-a-growing-news-story.html) to the front pages of newspapers and the tops of television newscasts.

**The Police Response**

The police’s actions suggested the flip side of a force trained to fight terrorism, but that may appear less nimble in dealing with the likes of protesters.

In everyday policing situations, the one-two punch of uniformed response usually goes like this: Blue shirts form the first wave, with white shirts following. [But those roles seem reversed in the police response to the Wall Street protests.](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/03/nyregion/nypds-white-shirts-take-on-enforcer-role.html?ref=occupywallstreet)

As the protests lurched into their third week, it was often the white shirts — the commanders atop an army of lesser-ranking officers in dark blue — who laid hands on protesters or initiated arrests. Video recordings of clashes showed white shirts — lieutenants, captains or inspectors — leading underlings into the fray.

And a white shirt is the antagonist in the demonstrations’ defining image thus far: Deputy Inspector Anthony Bologna’s dousing of penned-in women with pepper spray on Sept. 24, which seemed to surprise at least one of the blue shirts standing near him.

Deputy Inspector Bologna faces an internal disciplinary charge that could cost him 10 vacation days, the police said on Oct. 19. The office of the Manhattan district attorney, Cyrus R. Vance Jr., also opened an investigation into the episode, which was captured on video and disseminated on the Internet.

**The Media Take Notice**

In the first full week of October, according to Pew’s Project for Excellence in Journalism, the protests occupied [7 percent of the nation’s collective news coverage](http://www.people-press.org/2011/10/12/wall-street-protests-receive-limited-attention/?src=prc-headline), up from 2 percent in the last week of September. Before then, the coverage was so modest as to be undetectable.

The study showed that cable news and radio, which had initially ignored the protests almost entirely, started to give the protests significant coverage in early October, often with a heavy dose of positive or negative opinion attached.

Some protesters have assailed news media outlets for scoffing at their leaderless nature and lack of agreed-upon goals, but some have also carefully courted attention from those outlets.

The spike in news media coverage is significant because, among other reasons, it may lend legitimacy to the movement and spur more people to seek out protest information on Facebook and other Web sites.

**Getting Specific**

A frequent criticism of the protesters has been [the absence of specific policy demands](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/17/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-trying-to-settle-on-demands.html). Demonstrators formed the Demands Working Group in early October, hoping to identify specific actions they would formally ask local and federal governments to adopt.

In New York, the demands committee held a two-hour open forum Oct. 10, coming up with two major categories: jobs for all and civil rights. The team will continue to meet twice a week to develop a list of specific proposals, which it will then discuss with protesters and eventually take to the General Assembly, a nightly gathering of the hundreds of protesters in the park.

The General Assembly has already adopted a “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” which includes a list of grievances against corporations and a call for others to join the group in peaceful assembly. To many protesters, that general statement is enough, and the open democracy of Zuccotti Park is the point of the movement.